

“THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR”

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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AT HER MERCY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF “LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,” “A PERFECT TREASURE,” &c. &c.

CHAPTER XXIV. AFTER THE VERDICT.

WHILE Jack and Evy were still whispering together—not because what they spoke were words of love, but because the gravity and sadness of the occasion made all voices low—the officer of the court reappeared, and once more summoned the latter. “The coroner and jury wish to see you again, miss.” Evy turned deadly pale; was she then about to be confronted with Judith, and to be compelled to listen to some exaggerated and malicious statements, which she would have to deny point blank, respecting her unhappy uncle?

“They won’t keep you over a minute, bless you,” added the official good-naturedly, who set down her change of colour merely to the natural repugnance of the young lady to repeat an ordeal which she had flattered herself was concluded; “they never do when a party is recalled.”

A little comforted by this assurance, Evy reascended to the jury-room, where she found Judith standing by the long table, so beautiful, calm, and collected, that the recollection involuntarily occurred to her of a picture she had once beheld of Charlotte Corday before her judges. She did not so much as turn her head, or glance towards Evy as she entered.

“We have troubled you to reappear before us, Miss Cartew,” said the coroner, “to reconcile what appears to be a slight discrepancy between your evidence and that of this other young lady. You told us that, after you had retired to your room, you heard the voices of your uncle and the deceased in altercation; now please to tell us what you heard after that.”

“I heard my uncle go to his room, and afterwards—when their walk in the garden was ended—my aunt and Miss Mercer also retired.”

“Just so; and nothing more?”

“No,” said she; then colouring very much in spite of herself she added, “or rather, perhaps, I should say I did fancy I heard my uncle leave his room, though that turned out to be but fancy, for upon asking him at breakfast time whether it had been so, he assured me I was mistaken.”

“The fancy was at all events shared by this young lady,” observed the coroner, drily. “I can easily imagine you deemed it of no consequence, but in an inquiry of this kind there should be nothing, however apparently unimportant, left untold.”

This was apparently all that was wanted of poor Evy, and she once more sought the wretched room, where Jack and those two faithful ladies still remained, without whose presence she would, indeed, have felt forlorn. The presentiment of coming evil was growing more distinct, yet darker, with every moment.

“You are looking very ill, dear Evy,” said Mrs. Barmby, tenderly; “this dreadful day has been too much for you; let Captain Heyton escort you home, and Mrs. Storks and I will wait for Judith.”

But Evy shook her head. She would herself wait for Judith; and above all she would wait lest she should be wanted again, in the jury-room. The fear of what might come of those deliberations above stairs had assumed such proportions that she had made up her mind, should circumstances seem to demand it, to speak out, and let the jury know that if in herself they had had a witness anxious to extenuate—though the omission of her late and supplemental piece of evidence had, indeed, been purely

accidental—they had in Judith Mercer one at least as prone to malice and exaggeration, and a personal enemy of her unhappy uncle. However, she was not again sent for, and presently Judith came down with a grave and quiet face.

"They have kept you a long time, Miss Mercer," said Jack, with sympathy. He had a general notion "that all the women," with the exception of Evy, "were rather hard upon that girl," and was the more gracious to her accordingly. "I am afraid, by your looks, that they have been bothering you."

"You are very kind to concern yourself on my poor account, Captain Heyton," returned Judith, with a smile which somehow contrived to express, not only gratitude, but the sense that nobody but himself had any interest in her. "I have really, however, nothing to complain of. Being no relation to poor Mrs. Hulet, but merely, as it were, a dependent, the jury were naturally not so careful to spare my feelings as in the case of members of the family. It was rather trying—"

"There can be no sort of doubt about the verdict, of course?" observed Mrs. Storks, cutting Judith short. She had "no patience with that designing girl," nor the faintest belief in the genuineness of her humility.

"Indeed, madam, I trust not," replied Judith. "I have, at all events, done my very best to contradict the foolish and mischievous gossip that has been so long afloat concerning the terms upon which Mr. Hulet lived with his late wife, and the effects of which can alone cause us apprehension."

This was a keen stroke; for Mrs. General Storks had herself a somewhat unruly tongue, and, having ridiculed Mr. Hulet's reunion with his "Sophia," had afterwards pointed to the result with a natural triumph.

Whether there was a doubt about what the verdict might be or not, the interest felt in it was sufficient to keep the whole party in their present uncomfortable quarters until it should be divulged, which, however, happened within half an hour. So soon as there was a movement implying departure above stairs, the captain went up, and brought back the news.

The verdict was one of Accidental Death, accompanied by a "rider" to the effect that, in the opinion of the jury, the wall of the cliff walk, over which the unfortunate lady was supposed to have fallen, was dangerously low. A great weight seemed to be

lifted off Evy's mind when she heard this result of their deliberations, which she was most anxious at once to communicate to Mr. Hulet. She had little doubt that it was to the suspense and worry consequent on so distressing an inquiry that the indisposition of which Judith had spoken was due, and now she would be the physician to heal him with this news. She took a hurried leave of her good friends from Lucullus Mansion, and then started with Jack and Judith for the cottage. To the latter she felt that she owed some reparation for the suspicions in which she had indulged concerning her, and yet, somehow, she shrank from making any advances towards her in the way of friendship. Judith, on the contrary, was even more patronisingly affectionate in her tone than usual, and called the captain's attention to the noble manner in which "their dear Evy" had "borne up" throughout that trying day. Evy did not feel herself equal to conversation upon any topic, so that Judith had it all to herself, and during their short walk contrived to be humble, sympathetic, helpful, and patronising by turns. Her beauty, whose blemish, if it had one, lay in a certain lack of refinement, seemed to have become mellowed and toned down, as it were, by the distress she had herself endured, until it was well nigh perfection. The contrast between her and Evy, who hung her head, and looked a little wan and pale, was that of a rose to a lily.

Arrived at home, Evy left her companions in the drawing-room, and, not finding Mr. Hulet in the study, went up to his own room. To her first knock at the door there was no reply; to her second, a voice, so dejected, so hopeless, as it seemed, of all good tidings, answered it, that she scarcely recognised it for her uncle's.

"Who is there?" asked he.

"It is I, uncle; Evy. I have something to tell you."

She purposely made her tone as cheerful as she could, that he might guess her errand. Then, in the hush of that death-stricken house, she could hear him sigh, and wearily rise, and come across the room to unlock the door.

"I hope I am not wrong to disturb you, dear uncle," faltered she, amazed and pained to see how changed his face had grown from what it had been but a few hours before; for then, though it had been sad and grave enough, it was calm and steadfast—the countenance of one who had made up his mind for sorrow—but now

it was wild and haggard, and despairing, beyond the power of words to paint.

"Come in, Evy; sit down," said he, in a hollow voice, himself sinking as he spoke into a chair. Then, hiding his mouth, which she had noticed was working in the strangest manner, with his hand, he gazed out on the sparkling sea.

"I came to say that the verdict has been given, uncle."

"Aye, aye," said he, in such an abstracted tone that she could scarce believe he heard her. "Very true. The verdict."

"Good Heavens!" thought she, "has he been driven mad by misery that he should be so unmoved on such a topic! What subject can possibly engross his mind to the exclusion of this one?"

"Dear uncle," cried she, falling on her knees before him, "what is the matter—I mean, besides what I know of? There is something. I feel sure."

"No," replied he, starting, and looking at her with an anxious face. "There is nothing else. Is there not enough in to-day's work to make one sad and thoughtful?"

"Indeed there is, dear uncle, but I had hoped that Heaven had given you strength to bear it better. The trial is passing, dear. This wretchedness cannot endure for ever."

Mr. Hulet shuddered, and shook his head. "For ever, for ever," he murmured.

"Nay, nay, dear uncle; it seems so to-day, but it will not seem so to-morrow, or, at least," she added, hastily, suddenly remembering that the funeral was fixed for the next day, "in a little time. To-day is the worst day, and the worst is over. The verdict, I came to tell you, is Accidental Death."

"Accidental Death," echoed he, slowly. "Yes, I thought that was what it would be."

Her words of comfort, as she had expected them to be, had fallen on almost heedless ears. Her uncle had doubtless expected such a verdict, but still it might easily have been an open one, such as Found Drowned, which would have given occasion for unpleasant gossip, or, at all events, would not have put a decisive end to the affair. It was certainly a matter for comfort and satisfaction, if not for content, and yet he had shown none. To Evy, this indifference, so uncharacteristic of her sensitive and unsanguine relative, seemed a very bad sign. She would rather have seen him showing weakness in the other direction, shedding tears of grateful joy. Had this been the case she would not have informed him of the "rider" that the jury had appended to

their decision, but as it was she resolved to do so.

"The verdict was not only what I have said, uncle; it had an addition to it."

"Indeed," answered he, with some appearance of interest. "What was it?"

"Well, the jury expressed their opinion that the cliff walk was a dangerous spot, and that the wall requires heightening."

Now there was nothing, as Evy was well aware, that Mr. Hulet's nature resented so much as other people's interference with his affairs. A week ago he would certainly have gone into something very like a passion had any alteration in his premises been suggested to him, especially one which, as this did, implied a want of judgment or prudence on his own part. If he had any "kick" in him left at all, he would, thought she, have manifested it on the present occasion. On the other hand, if he had really thought that the jury were justified in their representation—if he deemed his wife had come to harm through any negligence of his—it was only natural that he should display emotion of another kind. As it was he displayed none whatever.

"Aye, the wall is low," was all he said. Then added, after a little pause, and with a stealthy side glance at Evy, "The next tenant will have to see to that."

"You have made up your mind to leave the cottage, then, dear uncle?"

"Yes, child, yes. We must do that." His voice was pitiful and tender, as though she really were a child whom he thus addressed, and his eyes were suddenly filled with tears.

"Yes, we must leave this," he continued; "don't ask me about it yet—not to-day, nor to-morrow, Evy."

"Indeed, uncle, I will not do so; the subject must needs be a very painful one. But don't shut yourself up here alone, dear uncle, and refuse what comfort we can give you. Jack wants to see you, just to shake your hand, you know; we all feel so thankful, for your sake, that to-day's sad business is over."

"Jack," said the old man, in a hoarse whisper; "is Jack—I mean is Captain Heyton here?"

"Yes, uncle, he is below in the drawing-room with Judith."

"Then go, darling," exclaimed Mr. Hulet, with eager fervour. "Go down, Evy, go down."

"Nay, but he can wait, and I can wait," said Evy, softly; "my first duty is here, uncle, by your side."

"Don't say that, Evy, oh don't say that," faltered the old man. "It is too much," and covering his face with his hands, he suddenly burst into tears.

Evy waited for the paroxysm to abate, then stealing her arm round his bowed head, and kissing him fondly, she strove to comfort him.

"You are unnerved and shaken, dear uncle——"

"Broken, broken," he sobbed out, "a broken man."

"Nay, you must not say that; and besides, you have two loving props to lean on, dear. You must let them do their office, uncle—which will be a pleasure and a duty to both—and to begin at once, you must not remain up here alone with your sorrow; or else you must let Jack come up——"

"Jack, Jack," cried the old man, putting his hand to his forehead, "what was that you said about Jack just now?"

"He is waiting below with Judith to see you——"

"Then, I tell you, go down," interrupted the old man, in hushed but vehement tones. "I cannot see him, nor talk to you any more just now. I am not equal to it; but go you down."

He raised her from the ground, for she was still kneeling, and with more strength than she could have believed him capable of exerting, hurried her towards the door. The excitement and apprehension in his face were most alarming.

"You will not lock yourself in again, uncle," pleaded she.

"Yes, yes; I must, I must, in case she comes."

"Who comes," asked Evy, not without a terrible suspicion that her uncle's brain had given way, and that he imagined himself haunted by his dead wife.

"Why Judith, of course, child. Hush." Here his voice sank to a terrified whisper. "Beware of her, and do not leave them together. Go down, go down."

And with those warning words he pushed her from the room, and locked the door behind her.

CHAPTER XXV. RUIN.

Evy did not at once descend into the drawing-room, notwithstanding her uncle's earnest recommendation to her so to do. On the contrary, it had the effect of sending her to her own chamber, to think for a little, in private, over the new misfortune that seemed to have fallen upon the ill-fated household. For was it possible

that such words as those, "Go down; do not leave them together," uttered, as they were, too, in such a tone of serious and eager warning, could have emanated from a sane mind? On review, indeed, of the old man's conduct in other respects during their late interview, they were hardly explicable on any other ground than temporary insanity. The marvellous change that had been wrought in his appearance and manner since he had left her but a few hours back at the inn; his indifference to the tidings she had brought him; the strange reply he had made to the official suggestion that the cliff wall should be raised, "the next tenant will see to that," and above all the anxious look which accompanied it, sidelong, tentative, wary, just such a one, in fact, as she would have imagined to belong to one whose reason had become unsettled. Even his occasional bursts of tenderness had alarmed her, from their suddenness and vehemence. Still, upon the whole, she resolved to confide her suspicions to no one; they might be erroneous; or it may have been only that the excitement of the last two days had been too much for him, and when the sad ceremony of the morrow was over, and things had settled down into their usual course, his mind would regain its equilibrium. Having come to this determination, she sought the drawing-room, at the open window of which Judith and Captain Heyton were sitting, just as she had left them. To see the light come into her lover's eyes as they met hers, and how he rose to greet her, was to set at naught the wild warning she had just received, so far at least as Jack was concerned; nor was there the least trace of confusion in Judith's face, to corroborate the idea of such treachery as had been suggested.

"How did you find poor Mr. Hulet, Evy?" inquired she, with sympathy.

"Very far from well," returned Evy, gravely. "What you said of his indisposition to see anybody was only too true. He does not feel equal even to see you, dear Jack."

"I dare say not, poor fellow," returned the captain, pitifully. "He feels all knocked to pieces, I dare say. It is better he should be alone, no doubt, and perhaps under the circumstances I ought not to have come to the house myself, eh, Miss Judith?"

For though, as a matter of fact, the captain's heart was too good to ever lead him far wrong in matters of propriety, he had no confidence in himself as to his know-

ledge of "what was the correct thing to do," and often applied for advice on the subject to people far less qualified than himself to give it.

"Oh, I think Evy may well be your excuse for that," answered Judith, with a smile.

"Ah, you are very good to say so, but I see how the matter stands," answered the poor captain, turning very red and confused. "Well, I won't come to-morrow then, if you think it better not—though I shall be at the—hum—melancholy seminary—I mean ceremony, at the cemetery of course—and the next day, Evy, when it is all over" (and here he brightened up amazingly), "I suppose I may come and spend a good long day with you?"

"Of course you may, dear," said Evy, who, for her part, saw no reason why he should keep aloof on the morrow, and felt by no means pleased with Judith for having suggested it. "And then I hope poor uncle will be more like himself, and able to see you."

So they two parted, not in the drawing-room before a third person, we may be sure, but in Mr. Hulet's deserted study, which was convenient for that purpose. They were not to meet again, you see (except by a grave-side, which scarcely counts), for forty hours, and the consequence was, that the executioner of King Charles the First was the unmoved witness of a very tender scene.

The next day came and went, like most days that are looked forward to either with great pleasure or apprehension, in a less abnormal fashion than had been expected. Death is too dread a king to have his awe intensified by sombre ceremony and observance; and the day of poor Mrs. Hulet's burial passed off much as such days do. There was a feeling of oppression rather than of sadness, a resentful endurance of the pomp and show which custom has imposed, and finally, a sense of relief to which all would have blushed to have given utterance. Mr. Hulet, Evy, and Judith, were of course the chief mourners, but many a one came to the cemetery to show respect for the departed, or sympathy with those she had left behind her. The widower exhibited no passionate emotion, but the traces of the deepest grief were so visible in his features, that it did not require much charity to conclude that the fountain of his tears had been wept dry. Not one word did he speak, either coming to or returning from the ceremony, nor, it was

noticed, did he after its performance so much as acknowledge the presence of the few acquaintances who would have been glad to press his hand, but stood with Evy's arm held tightly within his own, and his eyes cast down upon the ground.

"If you would only let me sit with you, dear uncle," pleaded Evy, tenderly, when they had got home, and he was wearily ascending the stairs to his own chamber, "instead of shutting yourself up all alone, I will promise not to speak one word."

Mr. Hulet stopped, and peering over the banisters as though to make sure that no one was within hearing, answered, "If you wish it, come, dear; I have something to say to you that may as well be said to-day as to-morrow."

Evy accordingly got her work, and presently followed him to his own room, where she found him sitting by the open window with his eyes fixed on the sea, and rapt in thought as on the previous day. Since he neither moved nor spoke, Evy addressed him.

"You said you had something to say to me, dear uncle."

"Yes, love, yes, I am thinking over it," sighed he, "thinking how I shall break sad news to a tender heart."

"Nay, uncle, if you have any new trouble, tell me at once, and let me help you to bear it," answered she. "Whatever it is it cannot be so bad as what you have endured already."

"It is trouble of another kind, my darling, but of its kind the worst that can be. Evy"—here he turned his wan face full upon her—"I am ruined!"

"Ruined!" The shock was a terrible one to her; she could not answer, like a heroine of romance, "What does that matter, the loss of a little money, when we have each other's affection?" She was not a selfish girl, and her first thought was for her uncle, ill and failing, deprived of all the comforts which were necessities to him, and leading a miserable old age; but her next, and it flashed upon her within the same second, was this, "If he is ruined, I can be no wife for Jack," and at that idea her brave heart grew chill.

"It is impossible," gasped she.

"My darling, it is true."

"But how, dear uncle? Have you lost your money in speculations?"

"Yes, yes, that is it; speculations."

"This astounds me," observed Evy, slowly. She was not thinking of the speculations, but of the wreck of her

loving hopes that had been within such a little of being realised.

"Yes, Evy, you would not have thought me to be one to speculate; but, unhappily, I did so. I got the news by the afternoon's post yesterday; that was what prostrated me so." Here he hid his face and groaned. "If I had ruined myself only, I could bear it, child, but to think that what I had meant for you, and counted with such pleasure upon giving you, is all gone, too, and through my own weakness."

"Don't think of me, dear uncle; we shall get on together somehow, we two"—she nearly broke down at this, for she meant "we two alone"—"and as for weakness, everybody is weak at times. If you have lost all, it is but money, not self-respect—"

"Yes, that is gone too," interrupted the old man, in despairing tones. "All is gone; all, all!"

There was silence for a little, during which poor Evy strove to piece these fragments, which it seemed were all she was likely to extract from her uncle in the way of explanation, into some sort of consistent whole. That he had lost a great part of his fortune she could not doubt, but she still hoped that he had exaggerated the calamity as he had exaggerated his own blameworthiness in it; for though he might have been weak, she refused to believe that he had done anything to forfeit "self-respect." When a rich man calls himself ruined that does not, she reflected, generally imply that he is reduced to abject or even distressing poverty. If he could only be got to go into particulars, some plan might perhaps be thought of.

"Well, dearest uncle, we must look our difficulties in the face," observed she, cheerfully, "and perhaps some of them may not then appear so formidable."

"No, no," returned he, with a shudder. "Don't ask me to do that. I dare not think upon them; only be sure that what I have told you is the truth. You see before you—unless a heart of stone can be melted—a penniless— Hush, what is that without?"

"Nothing, dear," answered Evy, looking out. "It is only some one opening the drawing-room window."

Mr. Hulet placed his finger to his lips, which had suddenly grown quite white.

"All this which I have told you is a dead secret," whispered he, "remember that."

"Nay, but if you are so poor, people will soon find it out for themselves, dear

uncle; though surely Judith, who has been so enriched by my aunt's death, will not think of retaining that large sum you gave to her at my request when we first came hither."

"My dear Evy, you judge others by yourself," returned he, with a strange smile; "Judith is not one to give up anything, nor shall I ask her to do so. I dare say I shall get on well enough; my only anxiety, indeed, is on your account. If I could only see you married—"

There were footsteps on the gravel beneath, and some one coughed. Mr. Hulet motioned with impatience to Evy that she should shut the window; and then, as though overcome even by that exertion, fell back in his chair, and closed his eyes.

"Dearest uncle," said Evy, in quiet but steady tones, "if you have not looked our changed circumstances in the face I have. If we are so poor as you have stated, it is impossible that I should marry Captain Heyton. He has given up enough for me as it is, and—"

"Nay, but that proves his love, Evy," interrupted the old man, rousing himself with an effort, and speaking very eagerly.

"Yes; but it would not prove mine, uncle, if I suffered him to make further sacrifices. He would make them, for he does love me, but—" Here she burst into tears. "May Heaven have pity on this poor old man," was her involuntary thought, "though it has none on me—No, uncle," she went on more firmly, "Captain Heyton will be reconciled to Lord Dirleton, and find a bride more fitting, and, I trust, more worthy, than myself. God bless him; God bless him!"

"You shall not give him up, Evy; you shall not," exclaimed Mr. Hulet, in a shrill and quavering voice, "I don't care what happens—"

Here came a knock at the door, and Judith's voice was heard inquiring, "Is Evy here, Mr. Hulet?"

"Don't let her in," he whispered, in terrified accents; "don't let her in."

"Yes, I am here, Judith. What is it?" answered Evy, softly.

"It is so beautiful on the cliff walk that I came to ask you to come out for a few minutes."

"I cannot come just now," was Evy's cold rejoinder; "I am talking on important matters with my uncle."

There was no answer; and presently they heard Judith's footsteps retire from the door and go down-stairs.

"I am sure, uncle," said Evy, slowly, picking up the thread of talk that had been dropped during this interruption, "that if you were not blinded by your affection for me you would see this matter in the same light as myself. I ought not only to release Captain Heyton from his engagement—for his noble nature might make him decline to accept the quittance—but to refuse to fulfil it."

"Don't ask me," moaned the old man, covering his face with his hands. "Don't ask me, Evy. Did I not answer that awhile ago?"

"You did, uncle; but you have had time to think since then, and have come to a wiser conclusion. I will leave you now a little, though not for long; I think a breath of fresh air would do me good."

She needed fresh air, indeed, yet looked as though neither it nor any other remedy could have done good. With a white face and trembling limbs she rose, and moved towards her companion; she could not see how he looked, but she could guess. "Don't weep, don't weep, dear uncle," said she, stooping down and stroking his bowed grey head, "this is a hard trial for both of us, but others have borne the like before us. You have been my guardian, my benefactor; a loving father to me for these many years. The time has come for me to show myself mindful of it. We two will walk the world alone together, and you shall lean on me."

She had drawn herself up to her full height by this time, and her face had a strength and purpose in it which had never been seen in it before.

"What," said she to herself, as with a steady step she left the room, "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" But the bitterness of the evil was yet to come, and in her heart she knew it.

A LONDON PILGRIMAGE AMONG THE BOARDING-HOUSES.

X. MONASTIC CHARITY.

AMONG the London boarding-houses that still remain for my investigation is the cheapest of all: the Refuge for the Destitute, or House of Charity, where you may board and lodge for a limited period without paying anything at all. But, somehow, this class of dwelling, which should exist by hundreds in vast London, for a time eluded my grasp. "Refuges for

boys or girls I found by the score, Houses for Fallen Women by the dozen; but none at first, save one, for wretched people of both sexes who had temporarily fallen down on the stony road of life. I enquired in Scotland Yard, where I was met with impenetrable civility, at police stations where wooden-headed constables rudely turned me out, surprised, probably, at anybody wanting to know anything, or, perchance, suffering from "Move on" upon the brain. But no information could I gather upon the subject, until, driven at last to my wits' end, I resolved to carry out the daring project of presenting myself disguised at the portals of an establishment to which I am a subscriber, armed with a letter of recommendation from a no less important personage than myself. To this end I borrowed an effective suit from an eminent comedian who is in the habit of assuming low-life characters upon the stage; filled in a form of application; primed my memory with a well-digested and plausible tale, and knocked at the door of the "Refuge for Distressed Persons in London" as the city time-pieces were chiming seven o'clock p.m. Admitted by a burly porter, whose figure suggested to my mind crunching of bones in the event of insubordination, I was requested to sit in the hall while the letter was presented to the Governor, and had time to remark the cleanliness of the wide stone stairs, the orderly aspect of things, the stillness only broken by closing of doors and skirts rustling to and fro, before a lady in black came slowly from above, and standing opposite to me, scrutinised me narrowly. A tall lady she was, thin and pale, with flashing dark eyes and shining bands of hair, half concealed under a close white cap and black veil. This was Sister Agatha, matron of the institution, which is of a high-church order.

"So you are the person," she said, softly. "You are in distress and wish to come in to-night? What is your profession? Photographer, you say? That's a class of business that flourishes just now. You'll be certain to get on if at all clever at it, provided you do not lose heart. Haven't got a change of linen? That's bad; but, perhaps the Governor will waive the rule in the present case."

And away she swept to reappear presently with the news that I might consider myself entered, and that, as I seemed respectable, I need not pass the ordeal of the

bath. The burly porter conducted me accordingly through a long corridor, and pointing down a passage, told me to "go in there and make myself comfortable." "In there" I found a large room painted yellow—lighted in the daytime by a skylight, at night by two jets of gas—a bare floor scrupulously scrubbed; two deal tables, covered with books; benches along the walls; a few sacred prints hung about; and twelve men lolling on the forms, or reading, or walking up and down with hands behind them, or playing games of draughts. One old gentleman, ensconced in a corner on a windsor chair, with a bandanna over his face, was snoring lustily; another, spectacles on nose, and mouth pursed up till it looked like a sea anemone, was carefully manipulating with needle and thread a rent in his pantaloons. The space above the mantleboard literally blossomed under an eruption of notices of all sizes. Orders for the porters. Orders for the sisters. Orders for the inmates. Rules and regulations without end. Breakfast rules. Dinner rules. Tea rules. Work rules. Play rules. The inmates were evidently tied up hand and foot, and made to pay for their accommodation with a dole of slavery, eating the bitter bread of grinding servitude, drinking diluted manacles and gyves. "All smoking, swearing, and other irregularity strictly prohibited." "There is a place for everything. Every inmate shall put back, exactly where he found it, any article of which he may make use." "No inmate shall stand before the fireplace, for the fire is made to rejoice the eyes of all." There was also a long code of hours, and duties, and bell-ringings. The bell, indeed, was very hard worked, being always on the clang for the announcement of something or other. Every inmate to get out of bed at half-past five, to meditate seriously until church time, seven a.m. Breakfast at eight. After breakfast each inmate to do his share of house work, which being reported as complete by the porter, the inmates were then to be allowed, unless anything special were taking place, to go out in search of employment. Dinner at half-past one. Evening service at five, from which, woe be to the inmate who was absent. Tea at six. Supper at eight. Prayers at nine. All gas to be extinguished at ten. Such is the divided day of inmates of the "Refuge for Distressed Persons," a house which has for its object the providing of a healthy and respectable abiding place

for all—male or female, Catholic or Protestant—who are temporarily out of work, and possess a change of clothes; giving them time to look round and pull themselves together, in the event of sudden dismissal from hospital, or by a choleric master; also holding out help to destitute strangers thrown upon the town, as well as to wandering girls of unblemished reputation, and children whom their parents are unable to support. An admirable institution, equally excellent in intention and in carrying-out, if a trifle exacting in its goodness, stern and forbidding in its protection. And that stern edict, "No smoking, &c." To some old men a pipe is more than bread and cheese. Why then thus arbitrarily deprive them of so innocent a solace? The result of the system is that, though extremely grateful for timely assistance, the luckless inmates seem withering in an iron grasp, pressed down under the harsh blight of prison rule, wrapped up in a robe of lead like Dante's hypocrites, sad and unutterably depressed under the ever-crushing consciousness of guilt—for they are guilty of the one crime the world never forgives, but pursues to the death with unrelenting hate, the terrible crime of poverty.

Presently the busy bell clanged, a door was opened, and the burly porter marshalled us all into a large refectory, where at one table we sat, each before a mug of beer and a thick hunch of bread and cheese, presided over by the porter, who devoured cold meat and mustard before our greedy eyes, while through an opposite door a similar set of melancholy objects wandered in, females, headed by a sister, and occupied a companion table at the other end. "No inmates shall be allowed to talk during meal-times." The sister read a long grace and we all fell to, bolting the excellent but grim food, till it well nigh choked us, lapping up the funeral beer, and then placing our plates and mugs tidily on a side table. "The men have done supper" announced the burly porter to the chilly sister. Then came another long grace, and we were marshalled out again, more low in our minds than ever, bitterly conscious that, heavy as iron, somewhere in our insides, lay the bread that was the stony gift of charity, at all events; and it is well, possibly, that such was the case—the dead-alive impression thereby induced would stimulate us to greater exertion after employment on the morrow, that we might partake of

this ghostly nourishment as little as might be. Quite overcome by a sense of our position, we sat about on forms, gazing gloomily at one another, while awaiting the hour of prayers. The old gentleman roused from slumber under his bandanna for supper, now snarled at us all, and showed his toothless gums. He had been porter at a club, and was now looking out for another place. "Don't look so cross," somebody said to him. "You look like a wild beast."

"Beast, am I?" he echoed. "No, I'm tame enough, I am. This is the place to tame a man. I should like to bang my head against the wall. In very desperation, I should like to sing a ribald song."

"For shame! for shame!" cried another.

"Don't be ungrateful. Isn't everybody kindness itself here? Don't you know that those sisters are real ladies born and bred, much too good to wait upon such swine as you?"

"Yes, much too good," growled the other. "A deal too good for me, bless 'em. Their black clothes and silent ways haunt me in my sleep like ghosts. I wish someone would hit me on the head, or knock me down, or do something lively," and the grumpy old fellow subsided into his corner again, and slumbered peacefully.

"Clang, clang!" went the bell, again that inexorable door opened, and again the burly porter drove us in, two and two, this time to prayers. The opposite door swung wide, the scared women trooped in, also two and two, and Sister Agatha, handing us each a book, intoned the evening service. It was a strange weird sight, that dusky chamber, its ecclesiastical rafters fading into gloom, an immense clock on the neutral wall, ruthlessly tick-ticking out the minutes with a vicious snap, as if it took delight in trumpeting out the time, through which these hapless waifs and strays were enduring charity. And what sad rows on either side the long table, at the head of which tall gaunt Sister Agatha was droning the words of peace and love! Her love was there; she proved it by the voluntary dedication of her life; but what a very uncomfortable love it was! —hard, cold, uncompromising, crystallized with a frozen film of duty.

It was in truth a strange assemblage of buffeted fragments, drifted bleeding to this haven from the world without, that I looked upon as Sister Agatha's voice rang monotonously in my ears. Wrecks broken

away from the anchor of hope, many of whom had long since ceased trying to enjoy the world, being content now could they but manage to endure it. Strangely mingled with these were fresh young buds, with the sunlight all before them, temporarily nipped, before they had had time to bloom. Next to me, there was a cabin boy, a fine young fellow, whose natural glee even this cold atmosphere could scarcely deaden; next him, a page boy out of place, whose father and mother had been the workhouse. Next to him, again, was a tall fellow with red hair and beard, great shoulders, and wide expanse of chest. Surely, he should be ashamed of himself, at the zenith of his life, to have dropped here, an able-bodied man, if ever there was one—but no, when he moved his unsteady gait betrayed the fact that he had been paralysed, and that, despite his powerful build, he was of use in the world no more. Once a soldier, he had been suddenly struck down on a bed of sickness, from which he rose disabled, to seek a scanty livelihood as best he might.

But while I was yet curiously surveying my strange companions, Sister Agatha closed her book, bowed an icy bow, and swept away, leaving us to be driven off once more by the burly porter, this time through the sitting-room into a long dormitory, where rows of beds on either side were divided one from another by a wooden screen, open at one end. Halfway down its length, the room possessed a bow, which was decorated with a strip of carpet, a bed, a chest of drawers, and little table. Here the burly porter was to sleep, a stalwart shepherd in the middle of his battered flock. Two or three faded mouldy old men sat on the ends of their beds, meditating gloomily, conversing in undertones round the edges of their several partitions. Mildewed butlers, all of them, whose increasing years rendered it daily a task of greater difficulty to obtain a situation.

"That ever I should come to this," sighed one. "I who have lived in the best houses, have 'moved to cheese' daily in the most superior establishments. Why, time was, when I would have thrown up a place if there was no carpet in my bedroom, and here I am now in a common dormitory, sleeping side by side with the Lord knows who!"

"What, haven't you been successful,

sir?" enquired his neighbour, sympathetically. "Ah well, it is uncommon hard for us old boys to get along in this rampageous world. Ah well! masters are a thoughtless ungrateful lot. Servants had just as well get quietly into their graves, as get old. Nobody has any sympathy for 'em. I had laid by a little store of money for my declining years, and an exploding bank burst it up, and every time I calls on a gentleman, he says to me, he says, as sure as fate, 'You're not up to your work,' and yet I'm willing enough, Heaven knows!"

"Yes, there are too many people in the world, I think," says some one, half-muffled in bed-clothes; "the creation of man goes on so fast at this time that I don't know what will happen to the next generation. There's not a class or calling but what's quite overstocked just now. People with large families ought to be made to drown half, like kittens."

And with this benevolent remark, this gentleman turned on his side and soon snored lustily.

"Where's the new comer, eh?" called out the burly porter, rattling his keys to bespeak attention. "Oh! there you are. Here's your bed, number eleven. I am sorry there are not clean sheets on it; but Sister Agatha went to bed before I'd time to mention it. Never mind; it was a very clean young man as slept in it last night. Now, my fine fellows, are you all ready? Out with the gas, then." And, suiting the action to the word, he rattled away, leaving us in darkness.

But now a singular phenomenon took place. With the light the leaden envelope seemed also to have departed. The men conversed quite freely now in their natural voices, unsubdued by charity, using language, too, scarcely in accordance with the rule and regulation aenent "smoking, swearing," &c. Nearly all were asleep before the porter came to rest, setting about his arrangements with methodical gravity, unaware that I was watching him from under my closed hands. And wonderful evolutions they were. Robed in a long nightshirt, he sat up in bed, like a Don Quixote, put on his spectacles, tied a voluminous red handkerchief about his brows, another round his neck, and, having placed a glass of water ready to his hand, and near it a half-muffled biscuit, proceeded to swallow two pills, studying the Daily Telegraph afterwards, perhaps to help take away the taste. But even his arrange-

ments came to an end at last, and, having placed a lighted bull's-eye by his side, he, too, joined the nasal chorus. Totally unable to sleep, I lay for hour after hour listening to the varied styles of breathing, wondering at the strange lives—each with its chronicle of disappointments—gathered together in that long dormitory, until daylight gradually paled the lurid spot from the dark lantern, and a loud alarm caused me to sit up with a start. As no one took any notice, however, I waited quietly, until presently another louder one ran down, upon which the porter unswathed himself of silken decorations, and, rapping the wall, shouted out—

"Now then, get up, will you?"

We all obeyed, and I casually inquired of my neighbour the meaning of the double alarm.

"Oh!" he replied, "the first one was to prepare us to get up at once as soon as we should hear the second, as there isn't much time given, and woe be to him who shall be late for church."

"Church?" I asked. "Prayers you mean, I suppose, in the refectory?"

"Not a bit of it. There's a chapel across the yard, with full musical service at seven o'clock. Tumble up, or you'll be late."

Ten minutes later, according to rules and regulations, we were all shaking out our pillows and making our beds, temporarily furbishing our faces and sweeping the several apartments with brooms, the cabin-boy being told off on special duty to annihilate sundry spider's castles, built high up, by means of a Turk's head broom.

Seven o'clock. Clang, clang! went the bell. We hastily rolled down our sleeves, hurried on our coats, and were driven forth across the yard in single file by the burly porter, who hurried our movements by shaking his keys. A bleak, cold open yard, sternly gravelled and paved; the risen sun veiled in heavy mist; a chilly dampness in the air. Surely, we were criminals being conducted with measured tread by turnkeys to a coming trial, shortly to stand disgraced in the cruel dock, to hear the just sentence on our crimes? No; we were only very poor and helpless, and were about to be ushered into God's house, to thank him humbly for the mercies showered on us by the agents of His will on earth.

A very pretty chapel it was, certainly, rich in tiles, and painted glass, and high-cuinched ornamentation. The sisters were already in their places in the choir, the

surplice choristers behind them; simultaneously with ourselves the female troop flocked in to a nook the other side of the altar. The great Governor himself entered the reading desk, and went through the service. In spite of the severity of their code, it was a beautiful sight to look upon, this band of men and women, many of gentle birth, voluntarily set apart for the relief of their unfortunate brethren—neat and tidy in all the arrangements for their behoof, gorgeous in the surroundings through which they would lead them to their Maker. And it was beautiful to hear the old cracked voices mingling with the young ones in a hymn of thankfulness, all sense of degradation, or feeling of resentment at what seemed like tyranny, wiped out in the overflowing of grateful hearts. The last note of the organ ceased, the rumble of its bellows died away as the old waif told off for its service left the instrument, and we turned from the tessellated floor, flecked with saints' forms in painted sunlight, back across the wan prison yard to our daily tale of work. Breakfast first though. Mugs of tea, and bread and butter *ad libitum*, amid silence not even broken by the sound, usual to our ears, of clinking spoon and saucer.

“Sister, the men's breakfast's done.”

Off we go again, each to be handed a broom, or mop, or pail, or scrubbing-brush, for the extra beautifying of the apparently spotless floor or tables. My occupation was to be the cleansing of the door-mats, a task which I rapidly accomplished, banging them together like dusty cymbals in the very centre of the prison yard. Shake them as I would, however, those obstinate squares of oakum would persist in giving forth particles of filth, and so, as I saw no advantage to be gained by the transfer of more than a given quantity of these particles to myself, I, too, speedily desisted, returning to the common room, considerably out of breath, and much begrimed, to meet the burly porter flourishing a pair of boots, exclaiming as he did so—

“Which of you men will volunteer to clean the Governor's boots? He's in a hurry—going out. It's my business, I know, but I'm very busy, and you might oblige me.”

All were too much occupied to attend to him, hissing over their labour like stable grooms, and so, the burly one, catching sight of me, cried out—

“Here, you've done your work; just oblige me with these boots, and I'll give you some of my meat at tea; the blacking and brushes are in the cupboard yonder.”

I took the boots and the brushes and the blacking, and felt much ashamed, in that I really did not know how to set to work on a task which is done daily in the streets under my very nose. However, I did my best; I rubbed and scrubbed, and scratched with an old table-knife, and finally turned out something not perhaps quite so evenly shiny as it should have been, but very thick all over with black compound, and really quite brilliant about the toes and knobby parts. Possibly the Governor was displeased, but I take this opportunity of assuring him that nobody ever cleaned his boots with so much pain and grief and toil before, with such a very unsatisfactory result. The burly one came back for them, thanking me good-naturedly, and placing as he did so on the table the advertisement sheets of the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*.

And what a rush there was for those scraps, usually tossed aside! How old men craned anxiously over the curly heads of the cabin-boy and page, running down with gnarled finger the long lists of “wants,” wherein everybody appears to be seeking what they never seem to get.

“Doorkeeper to an office in the city! That will do for me with my lumbago. Not much running about,” cried one, triumphantly, dotting down name and address in a greasy pocket-book, as he has done every weary day for a fortnight past in vain.

“Butler wanted. Steady and respectable. That's me,” said another, “to help in the garden though, I'm not up to that.”

And presently the two sinks in a recess are besieged. There is a tremendous splashing of water and flapping of towels, as each one prepares to look his best in hopes of at length finding a master. Sister Agatha has taken down all our names, with strict injunctions under no pretence to be late for dinner; the burly one throws open the great door; we pant and dart through it with freedom exultingly, as though the sunbeams flickering on the stones had not struggled on their way from Heaven through a murky crape of smoke, as if the balmy breezes that seem so tenderly to kiss our cheeks were not foul with decayed offal and corrupt with seething cabbage refuse from the neighbouring gutter. What matter? Freedom

is freedom still, whether enjoyed on the open moor or in the overheated city slum.

O worthy Governor and excellent sisters, unselfish workers in an admirable cause, will ye not think of this?

Nothing can exceed the noble intentions of all concerned—the absolute kernel indeed of kindness fast imprisoned in its icy shell—from Sister Agatha down to the burly porter. All were practically as considerate as could be. But will ye not temper your goodness with a little less austerity, that those who accept your alms may tender their warm thanks unalloyed, that the recipients of your bounty may depart from your gates, brimming with gratitude not untempered by a chastening shadow of regret?

JAQUES.

Rosalind. They say you are a melancholy fellow.

Jaques. I am so; I do love it better than laughing.

As You Like It.

What time, fair Autumn, musing, walk'd abroad; She of the dreamy eye and bounteous breast,

And lip fruit-stain'd, and calm brow loosely tress'd,

Her paths leaf-litter'd, and her gran'ries stored

With grain new garner'd from the widow'd fields;

What time thin mist made vague the passing days,

And sound grew sleepy, through the woodland ways

He moved, deep pondering as one who yields

His soul up to that twilight land of ghosts

And endless echoes, which men call the Past.

"Ay, ay!" he sigh'd, how little while do last

The glad green lives of all the leafy hosts

That feed the forest solitudes with sound,

And make a summer song throughout the land!

Ay, ay! how soon their corpses strew the ground,

Till bare and leaf-lorn all the wood doth stand

To front chill Winter and his winds!

Ay, ay!

So friendships fall from us and so loves die,

And leave us naked to adversity!

"A foolish world! a world of little lives

That dance and lisp a season in the sun,

Then wither from their places, one by one;

A world where never joy or hope survives

Its youth, but it is bitten by a frost;

Where much is miss'd and more is wholly lost;

Where love is dwarf'd, and faith, untimely starv'd,

And death alone is liberal! How halved

With bitterness are all its sweets! how stain'd

With sin and suffering all it has attain'd!"

Thus mused he in the forest, dim and drear,

Marking the falt'ring of the wanling year,

Till western skies were deck'd with cloudy bars,

And night, broad-bosom'd mother of lone stars,

Stole o'er the fields, bereft of all their sheaves.

Yet still he linger'd amid ling'ring leaves.

MY FREDERICA.

THE eyes of my Frederica were as blue as the sky, or as the sash that bound her slim waist; her complexion was of lily purity; her lips were as rosebuds bursting into flower; her hair was the yellow-gold of flax, intertwined with floss silk. I call her my Frederica by a sort of poetical

license and in right of my love for her. She was, in truth, at this time, the Frederica of the Herr Professor Vandergucht, the sub-rector of the university, for she was his daughter; and afterwards she became the Frederica of another. Still I ventured to call her mine—absurd as it may seem. I even call her mine now.

I was christened Hans, which showed, perhaps, that my family did not expect great things of me; for Hans has, somehow, come to signify a foolish sort of fellow all the world over. "Hans is slow, but he is sure," my father was wont to say of me. Slow? very likely. But sure? How, and of what?

I did not distinguish myself as a student. I drank much beer and smoked many pipes, and, as mementoes of my Burschen life, I still carry about with me a scar on my cranium, which will stand forth exposed unpleasantly when I have grown bald, and an ugly seam across my left cheek, the result of a badly-stitched sabre cut. I did not fight duels because I liked fighting, but because I could not well avoid it. Frederica had let fall, now her kerchief, now her bouquet. In my haste to gather up and restore these treasures I brushed abruptly against a fellow student. By mischance I even trod upon his toes. His feet were tender; his language was violent. Combat and bloodshed became unavoidable. He escaped without a hurt. I was less fortunate. It was owned, however, that I had comported myself becomingly.

I met my Frederica only now and then at the *soirées* and receptions of the Herr Professor, her father.

Did she know of my love? Yes; if she could read my glances, though, I admit, I have known eyes more expressive than my own, which are, indeed, of faint colour and feeble power, needing help from concave glasses. Yes; if she could penetrate my thoughts or divine my dreams. Otherwise she would be less informed upon the subject.

For I could not precipitate my love into words. My Frederica did not invite speech or indulge therein herself. She was too beautiful to have need of language; she was a poem in herself. It was sufficient to look upon her. To address her, or to hope to hear her, would have been outrageous presumption. So I held. I have heard her silence imputed to her as a fault. But of what sinful folly will not some be guilty? There are men who would have the Venus of Medicis fitted

with the apparatus of a German doll, and made, upon pressure in the ribs, to speak, "Pa-pa," "Ma-ma."

When I came to England I promised, to myself, that I would never forget Frederica. I planned to return some day and make her mine; meanwhile, I would grow rich. At present I was very ill supplied with money. My father could spare me none—his own wants were more than he could comfortably meet. He bestowed upon me his blessing, however—all he had to give. I received it gratefully, if not without a wish that it had been a more marketable commodity.

I had resolved to become a famous painter, or rather, I should say, a wealthy one. I knew that England, if she gives artists nothing else, gives them money, at any rate. Perhaps that is all they really require of her.

I found myself in London, the tenant of a garret, which served me for studio, sitting-room, bedchamber—all. I had made the acquaintance of a little group of fellow artists assembling at a cheap *café*—half Swiss, half German—in the Soho district. They were English, with a Frenchman among them, whose name was Alphonse, I think, or Adolphe; I am not sure which. But, when a Frenchman is not Alphonse, he is usually Adolphe.

They made me welcome, and were of service to me. One of them kindly introduced me to his pawnbroker, from whom I derived much useful assistance; though, the more I sought his aid, the more my wardrobe diminished. But that could not be helped. I had to live.

We talked, and played dominoes, and smoked—the Englishmen, cigars; the Frenchmen, cigarettes; I, my pipe with the china bowl, plated lid, andworsted tassels. They were kind to me, although they found me laughable, with my long hair, my spectacles, and my bad English. I did not mind. Indeed I did not understand them. Jokes as a rule are always thrown away upon me. As I have said, I am slow.

Of my art I soon discovered they did not think highly. I had brought with me from Germany a large unfinished picture. It was illustrative of a scene in the *Minna Von Barnhelm* of Lessing. I was informed to my chagrin that Lessing was almost unknown in England, and that my labour accordingly had been wasted.

I had been proud and hopeful of my picture, though I can admit now that it

was a crude and clumsy performance. My friends criticised it very freely—they grew derisive over it. I thought this hard, because the work had really cost me much. I have not a ready hand. I could never design with adroitness. For one stroke that is correct I execute six that are all wrong; so my canvas comes to have a muddled blundering look. I am myself shocked at its ugliness. Yet I usually—with obstinate toil and severe persistency—get things right at last.

My friends had quick eyes and dexterous hands—they sketched with surprising facility and vivid effect. Alphonse, as I will call him, was in this way especially gifted. He could design as deftly as he could twist up a cigarette, or twist the end of his moustache into pin-points. A few movements of his pencil and the thing was done. Much more than this I think he could not accomplish. He was true to his origin; he was of a nation of sketchers—great at beginnings, leaving completeness and achievement to others—the Germans let us say.

He grinned wickedly, scoffingly at my picture.

"My poor Hans," said an Englishman, kindly—he has grown famous since, I am glad to say, for he was a true artist, "this will not do. Turn *Minna Von Barnhelm* to the wall. That's my advice. Paint something smaller, simpler, or you will stand no chance with the dealers."

When we were alone, he proffered me help from his purse—though it was but poorly furnished, and he was, I knew, in debt. I would not borrow of him; but I thanked him till my voice failed me, and I could not see for my tears.

I had by this time quite a pack of pawn tickets. I was subsisting, like a moth, on my clothes. A coat lasted me a week, a waistcoat three days, and so on. But soon I should have nothing more to pledge, and then —?

I was very miserable. I could see suspicion and mistrust on the face of my landlady, printed in deeper and plainer lines every day. She was afraid of losing her rent. She told me I must give up my garret, and find another home. Where? In the street—or the Thames?

I tried to live on as little as possible. I went out every day for an hour or so, that my landlady might think I was dining. I walked hither and thither, in retired streets, furtively devouring a penny loaf of bread—it was all I could afford. Then

I returned, affecting a light step, singing or whistling, with the air of one refreshed and in good spirits. But I was an indifferent actor. Was she duped, that landlady, I wonder? Perhaps. My stomach was not, I know. There was no deceiving that.

What comfort was left me? Only my pipe and my love for the Frederica. And presently my pipe had to go—round the corner. My love, not being negotiable, alone remained.

I tried to paint—something, anything, a sketch, a study, that would bring money to buy food with. My English friend set up an easel for me in his studio. He had models coming to him; surely I could do something with them? Here was a Mulatto, of superb contour, muscular, sinewy, nobly proportioned, a Hercules in bronze. Here a lovely English girl, a bouquet of bright colours, roses and lilies, violets and gold. Here a Spanish gipsy, with blue-black hair, flashing eyes, ivory teeth, and cheeks like russet apples, flushed with sunset.

It was in vain. My heavy heart weighed down my hand. It was duller, more awkward, and inert than ever. I could do nothing.

I retreated to my garret. I flung myself upon my truckle bed; not to sleep, but to torture myself with fears, memories, dreams, my head burning, my brain disordered.

Dusk came, and then night. The moon-rays flooded the room, to fade gradually into the yellow twilight of morning. Another day was dawning to find me more wretched and forlorn and destitute than ever. I could not rise. I lay upon my bed, dressed as I was, thinking—thinking—in a confused, fevered way; not of the future; I did not dare do that; but of the past and the miserable, most miserable present. And, now and then, the name of Frederica broke from my lips.

Suddenly there came the sound of some one moving in my studio. I started—I roused myself. It was bright morning. A figure stood upon the little throne fronting my easel.

Frederica!

She was clothed in fluent draperies of white; her flaxen hair streamed, a very mantle, over her shoulders; her blue eyes were turned heavenward; her slender alabaster hands were crossed upon her bosom. She was a saint—an angel! The Frederica of my dreams, my hopes, my love, was posing before me!

I flew to my palette and brushes and set to work. I sketched with a facility and rapidity I had never before and have never since accomplished. I toiled on like one inspired. I trembled with eagerness. I could hear my heart beat; fire seemed to be coursing through my veins. A picture was growing under my hands—a picture to be proud of. I dreaded each moment that the vision would vanish. But she remained—motionless as ever—with the same rapt air, divinely beautiful. She spoke no word; nor did I address her. I dreaded that speech might dissolve the spell. My blessed Frederica!

I had been thus engaged some hours; my task was nearly completed. For a moment I paused to breathe freely, and to close and rest my burning eyes. I was faint and sick with fatigue and excitement. Yes, and with hunger; I had not tasted food for twenty-four hours and more.

When I turned again to look at Frederica, she had departed! All was over. It was a dream, perhaps; but I had produced a picture. My strength failed me, and I sank helplessly upon the floor of my studio.

Presently consciousness returned to me. I found my English friend and Alphonse beside me. They were inspecting my portrait of Frederica; for it was a portrait, although of that fact they had no suspicion.

"Come, cheer up, Hans," said the Englishman. "This will do. This is by no means bad, don't you know?"

"C'est magnifique," said Alphonse. "Voila un artiste qui peint de *chic*!"

He was pale with envy, it seemed to me. The picture was far beyond anything he could execute. Of that I felt assured. And he was jealous. I disliked him; that's the plain truth. And he did not like me. It may be that we did not understand each other.

I lost sight of him soon afterwards. Many years elapsed before I heard what had become of him. He was shot in the late war, it appeared. He had taken arms for his native land, and perished in an affair of outposts near Thionville—not a regular battle, but a mere sketch of one. So far, he had been faithful to himself to the last. He never had to do with anything beyond sketches. He could complete nothing—not even his life. That was but a fragment—an outline never filled in. But I digress.

The Englishman sent out for beer and bread and meat. He said cheering words,

patting me on the back; he sat with me while I ate ravenously, like a wolf. I ceased to tremble; I grew warm and comfortable. Then he took away my painting. He returned later in the day, bringing me money for it. He had sold it advantageously to a dealer of his acquaintance. I was happy and hopeful once more. And, forthwith, I took my pipe out of pawn.

My luck had turned. Thenceforward I prospered—not too suddenly, or in an extraordinary measure, but after a gradual and modest fashion. I was content if I could but earn a subsistence; and this came to be more and more a matter of certainty with me. I was enabled to sell my pictures, upon terms that were moderate, but still sufficient. Only I could produce but few pictures; not that I lacked industry, for indeed I laboured incessantly; but my constitutional slowness could not be wholly overcome. In time there arose a certain steady demand for my works. I was not famous, but I was succeeding. I had even sold at last my illustration of the scene in Lessing's *Minna Von Barnhelm*; and for a considerable price.

All this had occupied some time, however. Years, indeed, had passed; for it is only very rarely that a name can be made in a day; and, then, it is never such a name as *Hans*. I had worked on steadily without quitting London; but I had removed from my garret-studio to more convenient and seemly premises. I was growing grey, and a look of age had come into my face. My figure was less erect than it had been, and was tending to ungracefulness of contour. All my waist-coats had been enlarged. I was, indeed, portly, from drinking much English beer, or from age and success, combined with constitutional inclinations.

I had not forgotten my *Frederica*. Certainly not. But no such vision of her as I have described had again visited me. It was in my dire need that she had come to me; but my time of need was over. Still, she was often in my thoughts. Often I resolved to return to Germany, seek her out, and entreat her to be mine. I will go, I said, when I have saved so much money; when I have completed this picture or that. Still I did not move. My natural slowness hindered me; and I postponed my departure from time to time. ~~I had~~ I had fairly attained the end of my coming to England. I was generally recognised to be a successful painter in my peculiar and, perhaps, narrow path of art.

I was rich enough now both to love and to marry. Formerly I could only afford to love—an inexpensive pursuit as I had conducted it.

At length I was constrained to go; for news reached me from Germany of the serious illness of my father. The poor old man was dying, I was told. Alas! I arrived at his bedside only in time to close his eyes. Then I commenced my quest of the *Fraulein Frederica*.

It was with difficulty I could obtain any tidings of her. There was a new sub-rector at the university. The Herr Professor Vandergucht was no more. He was almost forgotten.

Presently came news; but what news! I was doomed to hear that my *Frederica* had become the wife of Herr Schnellen, of the firm of Eisendecken and Schnellen, merchants of Hamburg, trading largely in train oil, hides, and colonial produce.

I sought out Herr Schnellen, for I was determined that I would not quit Germany until I had seen once more my first and only love.

Herr Schnellen was an elderly gentleman, portly and bald, with very stiff collars; but his manners were gracious. I introduced myself to him, informing him that I had once enjoyed the acquaintance of his wife when she was the *Fraulein Frederica*, only daughter of the Herr Professor of my university.

"A long time ago, mein Herr," he said, with a laugh. "She was beautiful then."

"Wonderfully beautiful."

"One forgot her infirmity; at least, I did." And he sighed.

What infirmity? I did not dare to ask. Had *Frederica* a temper? Well, it was to be excused; she was the wife of Herr Schnellen.

He invited me to his house. He led me into a spacious apartment handsomely furnished.

My *Frederica*! It was difficult to recognize her in the rotund lady, rubicund, white-haired, short-of-neck, and redundantly supplied with chins, who sat huddled in an easy chair by the stove, with a crowd of chubby children of both sexes and various ages gathered about her. She was regaling them with "thick milk"—a mess of sour cream, sugared, and mixed with bread crumbs. Yes; it must be she, and no other. I suppressed my amazement as best I could, and advanced towards her, bowing with my utmost politeness, when there suddenly occurred an alarming noise in the street without, a

detonation—a violent explosion that shook the house to its very foundation.

"Ah! I had forgotten," said Herr Schnellen. "We must open the windows, or we shall have every pane of glass broken. You have not heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Paris has fallen. They are firing the salute in celebration of the great event."

Another roar from the guns.

"Come in," said Frederica, quietly, as though in answer to some one lightly tapping at the door.

"She hears!" cried Herr Schnellen, with a gratified air. "You perceive that Frederica is not so deaf as people have said."

"Deaf?"

"You have forgotten, mein Herr. Frederica was held to be almost stone deaf in her youth."

No wonder that in addition to her other charms she had possessed that of silence—that her repose of manner had been so supreme—that she had shrunk from being troubled with speeches, of which she could not hear one word!

"It makes her very quiet," said Herr Schnellen. "But that is not, in a wife, such a drawback as you may think."

There was a slate before her, which was employed, it appeared, as a means of conversation. She was informed, by its means, concerning me. But it was clear that she did not entertain the slightest recollection of me. There were so many students under the Herr Professor her father, she explained. And so many of them were named Hans. And they were all young; whereas I—but this she did not add—was middle-aged, to say the least of it.

Little more than this passed at our interview.

I took my leave, depressed and disturbed as to the present, but not as to the past; that could not be. I did not love the wife of Herr Schnellen. I am a moral character. But still I loved the Frederica who, though lost, was yet contained in the stout form of that matronly lady Frau Schnellen, like a sovereign secreted in a loaf of bread, or like the needle in the bottle of hay of your English proverb. It was true that my Frederica could not now be parted from the envelope which so substantialised and magnified her. That was a misfortune I had to endure as best I could. Altogether, I bore it pretty well.

Mine was still the ethereal Frederica. Herr Schnellen's the more material—I may

even say the very material—Frederica, from whom all ethereal properties had completely evaporated. Mine had been the spell; the disenchantment, possibly, Herr Schnellen's.

She never knew of my love. I am not sure that she was ever thoroughly aware of my existence. But what did it matter? The genuineness of my passion was not thereby affected. The votary's offerings may not be received; his adoration may be unrequited. Still, his sincerity remains unquestionable—it may even be the more sublime.

My love was a dream, almost a folly; but not entirely so, for, remember, it sustained me in an hour of sore trouble, it was attended with solid advantages. To it I owed such success as I have obtained; and moreover it coloured and influenced my life, weaving into its texture a thread of gold. It was romance—it was poetry, to my thinking; and have not these value, however seemingly fond and futile, vague of purpose, and vain of result?

I should have sought her sooner? It may be so. Perhaps things happened for the best. I still call her my Frederica, thinking of her ever as she was in my Burschen days—as she appeared in that vision in my studio, when she like an angel released me from despair and destitution, and led me back to life and well-being.

I returned to London to my art and to my pipe. Art, at any rate, is always faithful; and, perhaps, to one of my years, a pipe is the best of wives. It is silent as Frederica; but what comfort it exhales! how it bears with one! how it even encourages one's dreamings, and hopes, and flights of fancy! How companionable! how enduring! how consoling! And it never disagrees with one; unless, of course, it is very much abused.

WEST RIDING SKETCHES.

A RUN THROUGH CRAVEN.

BETWEEN Woolborough,* with its hundreds of factories, and the quiet Craven villages and dales through which I must now ask the reader to accompany me, there is almost as great a contrast as between the stillness of the backwoods of America and the hurry and excitement of New York—as great a contrast as we are accustomed to imagine between

* See ALL THE YEAR ROUND, Vol. XI., p. 54.

medieval England and Victorian England; and yet both Woolborough and Craven are in the West Riding of Yorkshire. It is doubtful whether any district in this country has undergone so little change during the last two or three centuries; has felt in so small a degree the influences of that progress which we are so wont to boast about; as the higher dales of Craven. Indeed, spending a day or two in these limestone regions is like shutting oneself out from "the world" altogether, or being spirited back into the feudal period. If you want to forget that there is such a thing as a steam engine; if you want to elude any everyday presence that may have grown hateful to you; if you want to know what solitude really is, and to feel that there is still peace to be had, slip quietly away to Kettlewell, or Conistone, or Arnecliffe, without leaving your address behind you. Then, if you like, you will find rest and repose. You will find yourself face to face with the quaint humdrum life of two hundred years ago; in a country where the maypole and the stocks still administer to the pleasures and pains of the people; where the village pump and the village "pound" are existing institutions almost as much as they were in the days of Tom Jones and Squire Allworthy; where the genuine English squire still holds a sort of baronial sway and has the squireal title always given to him; and where the parson has the full and comfortable spiritual control of the villagers in a far more complete sense than the dweller in a large town would ever suppose. Few persons who hurry on through the borderland of this place of retirement—through Keighley, Skipton, and Settle—to seek the better known pleasure haunts of Cumberland and Westmoreland, have any idea of the beautiful scenery and rural delights that are to be met with only a very few miles away. They see the towering heights of Whernside, Pennyghent, and Ingleborough, and say something complimentary as to the appearance and altitude of those Yorkshire mountains; but they seldom halt in their journey northward to explore the tract of country of which those hills are, as it were, the guardians.

The poet, the artist, the angler, the naturalist, and the geologist have, however, long been familiar with the district, and the pleasure seekers who follow in their wake are a yearly increasing race, though, as yet, they have not been suffi-

ciently numerous to cause the innkeepers to charge holiday prices for lodging and entertainment. Wordsworth, in his *White Doe of Rylstone*, and *The Boy of Egremont*, has sung of the beauties of Craven, and embalmed some of its romantic history in the enduring music of his verse. Turner painted some of his grandest pictures from studies in the valley of the Wharfe; Landseer, too, loved to linger in the romantic loneliness of Craven; and Creswick's many scenes in the "north countree" are chiefly reminiscences of days spent by him amidst the streams, the winding roads, and rustic villages of this out-of-the-way corner of England. In the Aire, the Ribble, the Nidd, and especially the Wharfe and its tributary streams, the angler is generally assured of abundant sport; amongst the Craven caves, hollows, woods, and mountain sides, the naturalist can always meet with specimens that will fill him with delight; the geologist can there roam through pre-historic seas and gulfs, and chip limestone scar and millstone grit to his heart's content; and, for the antiquary, there are ruined castles, ancient halls, and haunted glens—in fact, there is not much change in the aspect of the district since the days when Dr. Whitaker wrote so quaintly and learnedly concerning it.

The favourite way of entering Craven is, perhaps, by Ilkley, a romantic village lying adjacent to Otley, on the hill-side between the Wharfe and Rombalds moor. Heretere are some extensive hydropathic establishments—notably the one called Ben Rhyding—and in the summer and autumn months a large number of visitors make Ilkley their rallying point for excursions to Bolton woods, Malham cove, the Clapham and Settle caves, and the Yorkshire moors and mountains. Farnley Hall, near Otley, too, has almost come to be regarded as an English shrine, for the sake of the grand Turner gallery that is to be found there, and because of the fact that it was at this old hall that the great artist often sojourned during his visits to the valley of the Wharfe. It is not by this picturesque route, however, that I propose to penetrate into the interior of Craven at present; I prefer, rather, to leave the beaten track, and, instead of lingering amongst the more frequented and more accessible haunts, to dive into the remoter dales and wander at will—

"Amid the rocks and winding scars."

We will, therefore, enter this Craven

solitude from the Airedale side, turning away from the railway at Skipton. Here we are fortunate enough to catch the conveyance which by a stretch of politeness is dignified with the name of a coach, although known to the inhabitants mostly as the "posst," by reason of its conveying Her Majesty's mails. Our driver is entrusted with numerous commissions before we start. A servant lass wants a parcel left at a farm-house for a certain Jacky, who, we may presume, is her lover. A stalwart Saxon-faced yeoman sends a brace of birds to his mother, who lives at Kilnsey. Then there is a ham to be left at "Owd Billy's," a bonnet-box to be left at some Hall, and hampers and baskets innumerable to be dropped at wayside inns. We proceed through the town at an extremely slow pace, calling at one or two hostleries to take up stray passengers, most of which stray passengers walk from the inns to the coach, smoking long clay pipes. On we go, past the ancient Norman castle of the Clifford's, to which race Fair Rosamond belonged; past the old church where repose the remains of the first and third Earls of Cumberland; and out upon the high road, which grows more and more lonely at every turn.

Although our driver does not appear inspired with much reverence for ancient associations, or much admiration for natural scenery, he is, withal, an observant man, with a well-stored memory and a practical mind. The biography of every person in the Craven dales seems at his fingers' end. He knows where every resident originally "cam' frae," and has something to say as to the position and prospects in life of the occupants of each of the different halls, farm-houses, and cottages that we pass. But human habitations grow few and far between as we proceed. Half-a-dozen houses form a village up in these dales, and it does not take much more than twice that number to make a town. And as for population, there seems to be none. So few were the persons that we met on the road, that the driver had time to tell the complete history of each one before we came up with another. The advent of a new resident in these regions causes a tremor of astonishment to run through the entire district; the new-comer is a summer's wonder. Unfortunately, the departures of residents are more numerous than the arrivals, the higher towns and villages being thinner in population now than they were a century

ago. We came across empty houses in most of the villages, and rents are merely nominal, ninepence a week for a roomy cottage being considered rather high. One landlord, whose acquaintance we made, owned a block of three substantially built stone houses (all empty), situated in a lovely spot, near the foot of one of the great hills, and on the banks of a romantic stream, and these three dwellings he offered to throw into one—to make a mansion of them, in fact—in consideration of a yearly rent of five pounds! As a further instance of the sparsity of population hereabouts, it may be mentioned that a short time ago, a tradesman with more spirit than foresight bethought himself to build a small cotton mill in one of the Craven towns; but when he opened it he found it impossible to get "hands" to work it. He might almost as well have tried to introduce the manufacture into the desert of Sahara, for in the end he had to pull the mill down, and leave the people to their ancient ways. Indeed, it is only a very few years since, that the district reached the stage coach period of civilisation, and the same interest appears to attach to the passage of the coach through these places now, as forty years ago, in more populous localities, was caused by the appearance of a railway-train. As we passed through each village, a crowd of about six persons would assemble to watch our arrival at and departure from the village inn, the coming and going of the "posst" being clearly the chief event of the day.

The scenery increases in beauty as we get further away from railway land; the fells and scars grow more numerous, the dales and gills spread out before us with greater clearness, and the outlines of the mountain tops become more distinctly defined. Soon after leaving Skipton we come upon a house known as the *None-go-by*, and are told that it derives its name from a custom which existed down to a period within living memory, that every newly-married couple passing that way had either to leave a shoe there or fourteen pence, which sum would hardly be deemed a fair equivalent perhaps at the present day. An ancient hall called Scale House, not long since restored, next comes under our notice; and then—

High on a point of rugged ground,
Among the wastes of Rylstone fell,
we discern the ruins of Norton Tower,
whence Richard Norton "and his eight

good sons" went forth to join "The Rising of the North" in 1569, and the spot round which Wordsworth has thrown the halo of poetic romance in his *White Doe of Rylstone*. The village of Rylstone, or Rylston, as it is now called, is a picturesque little place, a very Auburn, eminently fitted for the scene of a pretty poetic legend. Cracoe comes next, then Linton (where there is a hospital, and where the high road passes through a stream which is at times impassable), and then Grassington, contracted by the natives into Gerston. Grassington is, as towns go in these northern fastnesses, a place of some size and importance. It has a population of about a thousand, and owns a Mechanics' Hall and four inns. There is also a fine old mansion here, which dates from a far back age, and it is on record that Edmund Kean, ere fame had got hold of him, once had the honour of acting in a barn at Grassington. From Grassington we push on to Kilnsey, but the sun has sunk to rest before we leave the comfortable fireside of the inn at the former place, so that our passage through Grass Wood, which many people account superior in beauty to the historic woods of Bolton, is performed in the dark. But it is a clear night, the sky is one mass of stars, and the dusky firs and pines of the wood stand out in mysterious relief on each side of us. The scene, grandly beautiful as it is by day, looks wild and weird in the darkness, and the stories that are told of a horrible murder committed there during the last century, and of the murderer being hung on a gibbet from one of these same tree branches that we are looking at, do not conduce to rid us of the fears and forebodings that the wood seems to inspire. The wood has also been the scene of one or two romantic suicides, of which the dalesmen tell over their fires of a winter's night with as much interest as if they were speaking of events of yesterday. Indeed, if we give ear to tradition, which is almost as many-tongued as rumour, we cannot help picturing Craven as a district as specially given up to ghosts, goblins, witches, and other superstitious horrors as a Christmas number. It was in these dales that Eugene Aram—the real Aram, not Lord Lytton's—was born and passed his youth, and where he doubtless acquired that air of misanthropy and mystery which clung to him throughout his career.

Kilnsey is our next halting ground, and here we take our ease for a brief space at the

only inn in the village, the rendezvous of one of the chief angling clubs in the North of England. The bar parlour contains a couple of walking tourists, deep in the study of their guide books, and a gentleman waiting for a post horse to carry him a stage further; the tap room is tenanted with the unusually large company of seven persons—shepherds, miners, and farm-labourers—who are nearly all drinking gin, which is as common an article of consumption in these dales as in the London palaces devoted particularly to its sale. They have at command in Craven some of the finest ale in the country, but, presumably because it is produced amongst them, they leave it for strangers to appreciate, and will have nothing to do with it themselves. At this inn we hear the Craven dialect in all its purity, but as a certain anonymous writer has said in that dialect, "What a feaful girt gaunison mun he be at frames to larn th' talk of another country afore he parfitly knaws his awn," I will not attempt to transfer this peculiar language to print. The Craven inns are exceedingly clean and homely, partaking partly of the character of farm houses. The business of public-house keeping in itself would be insufficient in these regions to yield a livelihood, so the landlord always unites the two occupations of innkeeper and farmer. Such large fires are kept in the inns that we are led to inquire if there has been some recent discovery of immense coal seams in the neighbourhood. "It's half Threshfield and half Skipton," says the landlady, pointing to the fire; and then ensues a long explanation as to the relative value of each. Skipton coal is coal that is fetched from the railway, and may have come from any of the great coal districts; Threshfield coal is obtained from a place of that name near Grassington, but its quality is not equal to the other, as the following anecdote will suffice to show.

"I remember," said one of the farmers, speaking in the dialect which I have already said I would not attempt to reproduce, "I remember once being at my sister Mary's, at Skipton, and she said to me, 'Well, our Sam and me, we've been wed seventeen years come next Nidderdale Rant, but never while now have we had anything in the house that we could keep.' 'Whatever can it be?' I said, for I knew only too well that they were none of a saving turn. 'Well,' she went on, 'there's two things that we can keep, and those

are, Threshfield coals and Irish bacon; the one we can't burn, and the other we can't eat."

My friend Grantios and myself walk on a few minutes in advance of the "posst," telling the driver we will await him at the Scar. Such villagers as are abroad carry lanterns in their hands; we, however, have to be content with the starlight. We soon arrive at the well-known Kilnsey Scar, a great frowning limestone crag, a hundred and seventy feet in height, and with an overhanging projection of forty feet. According to Professor Phillips, this crag, in the pre-historic period, was a promontory against which a pre-historic sea lashed and foamed. At present it is the principal feature in a landscape of unusual beauty, and, though there is no sea to wash against it, as of old, there is the pleasant river running almost at its foot. The Scar is so close to the high road that it almost seems, in the darkness, to hang over us as we stand looking up at its grim face! But that same distance which lends enchantment, also perpetuates deception, for although it seems the easiest thing in the world to throw a stone to the top of the Scar, it is not one in a hundred persons who can throw one to its base. Of course we tried, and equally, of course, we failed. The foot of the crag is strewn with thousands of stony evidences of similar failures. Before the "posst" overtakes us, there is another peculiarity about the Scar that we do not neglect to bring out, and that is its wonderful echo. I should not like to assert that it will match with Paddy Blake's famous echo, which, when asked, "How d'ye do?" replied, "Very well, thank you;" but the Kilnsey echo will fling you back a song, a threat, a jest, or a laugh, so readily and loudly, as to set your thoughts running towards the world of spirits, or, at all events, towards the world of mythology. My companion called the goddess forth with an operatic stave or two, while I, and a number of minor echoes, kept up a running chorus. I hardly know how people do to "make the welkin ring," but I half imagine that we accomplished that feat beneath Kilnsey Crag that night.

Presently our coach overtook us and we were taken on to Kettlewell, a quaint old town which nestles at the foot of Great Whernside. Here, at a comfortable inn, yclept "The Race Horses," we stayed for the night and next morning went through "the Slit," and over "The Top" to Arnecliffe,

where we halted for another day, enjoying a seclusion which perhaps would be unattainable elsewhere in England. What a pleasure it was to feel that we were sixteen miles beyond the reach of a railway! Here we were in the midst of wild, picturesque mountain scenery, amongst a hardy, cheerful people, who live in contentment in regions remote from steam engines and machinery, from newspapers and popular amusements.

The night that we stayed at Kettlewell was perhaps the most memorable of the year. A grand christening party was being held at one of the principal farm houses in the neighbourhood, and nearly all the town had been invited. A Penny Reading had also been announced, unfortunately, for the same night at the Mechanics' Institute. It was impossible that Kettlewell should find a sufficient number of people to make both entertainments a success the same night, although an audience of fifty would have sufficed to crowd the Mechanics' Institute, so it was at last decided to postpone the reading until another week.

So much for the amusements of the dalespeople. Their work is as unvaried. All the land in the higher dales is grazing land and a large portion of the population is employed in shepherding. The fields are altogether unploughable, the white limestone rock cropping out above the surface in every direction. Every hillside has its immense sheep pasture, and standing on some of the hills and looking down upon the long stretch of undulating scenery that lies below, the same craggy, wild aspect presents itself far and wide. There is hardly a tree to be seen for miles in some of the dales; the tall limestone walls, built in the rudest fashion, run zig-zagging up and down the hill sides, but there is nothing else to break the continuity of the landscape. One or two gentlemen proprietors have taken to planting trees—especially has this been done by Sir John Ramsden, at Buckden—and the effect has been in such cases to convert bare tracts of land into sylvan paradies.

The working population are farm labourers, shepherds, or lead miners, but of late years the lead mines have been less productive than formerly, and consequently many miners have migrated to other parts of the country. I must not omit to mention, however, that there is still another portion of the working community that deserves mention, and this portion is made

up of sheep dogs, who evince an amount of intelligence which almost puts them on a level with their masters.

Our advance upon Arnecliffe was made during a stiff gale which at times threatened to blow us back upon Kettlewell. Once we had begun our ascent of the hill which divides Arnecliffe from Kettlewell there was no shelter to be had from the elements, whatever their humour might be. There are many stories told of people being lost in crossing from one dale to the other. A summer or two ago, a party of gipsies, making for Pateley Bridge, attempted to cross in the night time. It was about eleven o'clock when the gipsies passed through Kettlewell, and not a person in the town was out of bed. The party, consisting of men, women, and children, passed through the quiet village and up the hill-side, but in the dark they were unable to find "the Slit," a sort of mountain pass through which the road goes. Groping about helplessly on the mountain side, running the risk of being precipitated from some rocky cliff every moment, they were seized with terror and began to call loudly for help. "Lost! Lost!" was the cry that rang through the sleeping village, and over the wide dale. Soon all the inhabitants of Kettlewell were astir, and the male population, with lanterns in their hands, turned out and rescued the affrighted gipsies from danger.

After sojourning for a while in the picturesque solitude of Arnecliffe, with its quaint church, its village green, its village pump, and its bonny river, we turned away towards the Malham Moors, and made our exit from Craven by way of Bolton Woods, Addingham and Ilkley.

YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "HOBSON'S CHOICE," ETC.

CHAPTER LV. AN INVITATION.

I MISSED Tony greatly. He would have taken so much interest in my new labours—would have so cheered me with his sympathy. Perhaps I missed, too, the applause he was wont to lavish upon me. It was too flattering, it was undeserved, no doubt; still it gladdened and encouraged me. I had not the heart to find fault with it. It would have been like finding fault with him.

Mole was what is called "good company." But I could not esteem him quite as I did Tony. I felt much the lack of a

comrade of my own age and standing, whose views of life and the world were in accord with mine, even in their foolish hopefulness and young temerity. Romance and sentiment had still charms for me. I could scarcely speak upon such matters to Mole. Time and experience had made him too practical and prosaic. He had outlived ambition, probably. He was not troubled by anxieties as to the future; it held out to him no particular promise, and he did not care to contemplate it. There was something of the stroller still, perhaps, in his method of thought and existence, only that he no longer looked forward to possible triumphs to be achieved by-and-by. The cares of the day were sufficient for him. He had secured an engagement; that was enough. When it terminated it would be time enough to seek another. He was content meanwhile. He asked but for enough to eat and to drink—the latter especially. He was never despondent, except, perhaps, as to the condition of the modern stage, and that failure of his voice which had closed his career as an actor. But he knew how to impart a certain humorous flavour even to these subjects. I always found him entertaining and enlivening, kindly and considerate. He took great pains to instruct and improve me in the art of painting. Every day I worked with him in the upper studio, the "manufactory," as he called it. His skill was unquestionable. I often marvelled that he had not turned it to more profitable account. Surely he might, had he so chosen, have been something better than Sir George's journeyman. Had he been hindered by some inherent defect in his moral constitution, "some vicious mole of nature?" (I did not mean to pun upon his name.) It could not have been merely lack of opportunity. Or had he erred at starting by mischoice of his profession? But I was on dangerous ground. If I was now a painter, or trying to become one, had I not previously essayed farming and law?

It was a curious life I was leading. If I sometimes deemed it monotonous and confined, even somewhat dull, I soothed myself with reflecting that I was really acquiring a profession, serving an apprenticeship. In any case, I was Sir George's assistant but for a term, which I could conclude at any time. And my occupation had its pleasures. Even the replica of the Royal portrait I was engaged upon, though Mole viewed the task irreverently, was to me full of interest. I congratulated myself upon the

decision and correctness of my outline—upon the force and breadth of my execution. It was the largest canvas I had ever worked upon. I delighted in plying my brush with a drumming sound, as I spread and rubbed in colour over the tightly strained elastic surface. Every now and then I retreated some yards from my easel, to consider the effect of my performance, and I noted with gladness how gradually the kingly figure was emerging from hazy inanity, and, with every stroke of my pencil, assuming more and more of the hues and aspect of life.

"I really begin to feel myself a painter."

"Of signs, or of scenes? Which?" Mole asked laughingly.

"But only look at the noble folds and shadows of these velvet robes."

"Wait until you've been at work as I have upon a dozen or more of those portraits. You'll begin to find a very Republican feeling stealing over you."

Sir George, I was gratified to learn, had expressed his satisfaction with my labours.

I saw but little of him. He had been true to his promise that I should not be interfered with in any way, that I should enjoy perfect liberty in his house. My room had not proved the Haunted Chamber Mole had described it to be. My rest there was undisturbed by ghosts. I slept soundly, and, so far as I am aware, no apparition ever issued from the great corner cupboard. All was still enough; save for now and then the rumbling of coach wheels in the roadway, and, sometimes, very late at night, or in the early twilight of morning, the noise of the street door closing. Sir George had re-entered. He was usually absent after sunset; the hour of his return home was always uncertain.

He only worked intermittently at this time, often declining to see his sitters on the score of his health. Still he was never altogether idle. Sometimes he would mount to our studio, inspect our progress, and touch upon the canvases before us, always, as it seemed to me, to their advantage, although Mole generally disputed this. I thought his eye wonderfully correct. He detected errors and shortcomings very promptly. His manner was invariably polite. "I think you'll find that's rather out of drawing, Duke," he would say; or, "I fancy you might improve that heavy mass of shadow by breaking it up a little." He did not

so much give orders as offer suggestions. "Oblige me with your brush for a moment;" and with an adroit stroke or two he effected a real improvement. I was more than ever convinced that he was in truth a great portrait painter. In his composed way he seemed pleased, or perhaps I should rather say, amused with my evident admiration. "You only want practice, Duke. You'll do all this for yourself, some day, far better than I can do it." And as he spoke he patted me encouragingly on the shoulder.

He occupied himself, too, with sketching and planning works to be completed at some distant day—when he had time. He was haunted, I think, by a desire to win distinction in the future as an historical painter. He was employed at intervals upon a series of allegorical compositions to be executed on an imposing scale. But he was apparently hard to please. He was moved by impulses; then came weariness and dejection, and his hastily adopted projects were thrust aside and abandoned, as though the temperature of his enthusiasm had lowered, or some insurmountable difficulties had suddenly confronted him. There seemed about him a want of power to concentrate his energies. He was now languid almost to lethargy; a drowsiness oppressed him that would not be shaken off. And now he was strangely stirred, his eyes curiously bright, and every nerve tremulous with excitement. At times too, I am satisfied, he suffered acutely. The lines in his face deepened, and he looked very wan and worn. He would stop abruptly in speaking, with a painful wincing expression. But he uttered no complaint. He seemed anxious, indeed, to hide his suffering.

One day Propert brought me a message from him. He desired to see me in his studio.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Duke, but I'm sketching and I want a line or two from nature. It's a fanciful subject. Perhaps you would not mind sitting to me for a few minutes. Clasp your hands—so. Yes, that will do. Lean forward a little. Look up. Your head turned a little to the left. Yes, that is just what I wanted. Lean forward a trifle more. Thank you."

He sat down at his easel and began sketching. Now glancing at me, now bending over the drawing board before him. I remained perfectly still. After a while the scratching sound of his crayon gradually ceased. I ventured to turn towards him. He was not drawing. His

head had sunk upon his breast. His gaze seemed fixed upon the ground at his feet. His hand hung down listlessly before him, still holding the crayon, however. Suddenly it slipped from his fingers. The noise of its fall roused him. He started and shivered. He was deadly pale.

"Are you ill, Sir George?" I enquired, hurrying to him. He was silent for some moments.

"Where am I?" he demanded at length. "You here, Duke? No, it's nothing. I'm not ill. I was led away by my thoughts, I forgot where I was; what I was doing. That happens to me sometimes."

His voice sounded weak and hollow. I felt alarmed about him.

"But indeed I fear you are really ill, Sir George. You need rest and change."

"That's easily said," and he laughed, strangely, I thought. He rose and moved towards the mantelpiece; leaning there, with his hand covering his eyes, he presently grew more composed.

"It was a feeling of faintness, that's all, Duke; I'm subject to it at times. It comes over me quite suddenly, and sets my hand trembling, as you see. Happily it doesn't last long, however. It's nothing really to be alarmed about. I'm quite myself again now. But don't speak of this to any one. I've not been very well, lately, as you know. A very little seems to upset me now. I shall be better soon. But I'll not trouble you any more now. It's plain I'm not in a working mood to-day. You must sit to me again some other time."

"If you could only rest for a while, Sir George, and breathe pure fresh country air. I'm bold to say it, perhaps; but if you would but come home with me—to the Down Farm."

"That can hardly be, Duke," he interposed coldly, I thought, and almost with an air of contempt.

"Forgive me." I felt that I had been presumptuous. I had forgotten how great a man he was.

"I have nothing to forgive. I have reason, indeed, to thank you; for you mean kindly I am sure. But are you quite certain you have authority to offer me the hospitality of this Down Farm—this home of yours, of which you seem, and rightly enough, no doubt, so fond and proud? Would your friends there—your relations, sanction and confirm your invitation, do you think?"

"Certainly, Sir George. They are your relations, too."

"That's true. But the fact has been so long overlooked—forgotten, almost by me, if not by them."

"No, not forgotten, or I should not be here. And they have not forgotten it, and will not. Besides, they would heartily welcome any one who had been so kind to me as you have been, Sir George. I'll answer for them."

"That's bravely said. I never dare answer for any one. But you're young, and I grow old; that makes a difference, no doubt. For what you call my kindness, please don't speak of it. It's been but a trifle at the best. I think I've told you so before. Never waste gratitude. The thing is too rare and precious. Rest and change are hardly for me. I have, as you know, many engagements—much to occupy me. I cannot quit town. And, in any case, the change you propose would not benefit me, I think."

"The Farm's but a humble place, I know, in a very retired part of the country; but the air of our downs is wonderfully pure and healthful. My mother and uncle might seem to you, perhaps, very homely, simple people; but they are most kind of heart, Sir George. They would be pleased to be of service to you; they would feel honoured by your presence in their house. You would be assured of perfect rest and quiet. No pains would be spared to forward the recovery of your health."

He had appeared to hesitate; at least he had spoken somewhat faintly. I had thus been emboldened to dwell anew upon the merits of my proposal. But he answered somewhat impatiently, beating his foot upon the floor, while his face flushed somewhat—a patch of colour glowing on either cheek.

"I thank you, but it cannot be, Duke. Your home is delightful to you, very likely; it should be so; though you were nothing loth to quit it. To me it might prove dull and dreary beyond expression. Perfect quiet would drive me mad, I think. I can bear my maladies—the remedy you propose would be unendurable. You're a young physician; you must study your patients a little more closely before you venture to prescribe for them. It cannot be, I say. Your Down Farm is not for me. Don't look hurt, Duke. I did not mean to offend you. My temper is less under command than it used to be—than it should be. My words were ill-chosen. I'm sorry that I spoke so sharply.

There was no need for it. Forgive me, Duke, and let me say again, I thank you."

I had felt somewhat offended, I own; but I was appeased in a moment. His conciliatory tone and his graceful kindly air were not to be resisted.

"By-the-bye I think I must make a sketch of you, a new sketch, Duke. I shall do nothing more with this I think—at any rate for the present. It must be laid aside with my other failures—they increase and multiply sadly as time passes, and age comes on me. But it's the same with us all; and this is but a poor thing. Your head, I have noticed, comes very well in certain lights. And you have, at times, a certain expression I should like, if I could, to secure. I really think I can do something rather better than ordinary with it. We'll see, however. You can give me a sitting to-morrow morning, let us say? It's a fancy of mine, but I'm sure you'll humour it. I won't keep you any longer now."

I sat to him for an hour or so on the following morning, and on some subsequent occasions. He said little, but he worked assiduously. He seemed not altogether satisfied with the result, however.

"My skill is failing me I do think," he observed. But after a pause he went on again with the drawing. It was in black and red crayons, an imitation, as Mole declared, of the manner of Bartolozzi.

"He's always imitating some one. Yes, it's something like; but flattered of course. Your nose hasn't such a delicate line as that, and your chin isn't nearly so refined. But the eyes are good. He always succeeds with his eyes. That's the real secret of his fame."

Mole studied the portrait for some time, frequently comparing it with the original.

"He ought to do it in oils; but he never will. A fancy of his he called it, you say? Yes, he's full of fancies. But I don't suppose he'll take it into his head to paint me—although, if he really wanted a striking subject, he might go further and fare worse. But I forgot—you're a relation of his. That explains it, perhaps. I'm not. I've no relations, in fact. Though, if I were to come into a fortune—which is not likely—I dare say I should find plenty who'd claim kindred of me, although they certainly wouldn't have their claim allowed."

"A letter for you, Duke," said Sir George one day.

For me? It was from Rosetta.

"Miss Darlington—she was here this morning—entrusted me with its delivery. It contains an invitation, I believe. You are an old friend of hers, it appears. You saved her life once—so she says; but that, perhaps, is only her theatrical way of talking."

He was smiling, and yet, I thought, he was watching me rather closely.

Rosetta, I knew, was a frequent visitor at the house in Harley-street, although I rarely saw her. Not that the picture of the Comic Muse was nearly completed. But Sir George had been making numerous sketches of the actress. She had sat to him repeatedly. He had portrayed her in fanciful costumes as St. Cecilia, Pandora, Iphigenia, Sensibility, Calypso, &c. These were but slight works for the most part; mere outlines in some instances. It was not clear that he ever intended to finish them.

"She is very charming; I have rarely seen a more beautiful head. And she is clever too, in her way. You will visit her of course, as she wishes it. Only remember, Duke, actresses are not quite angels. At least their wings usually fall from them as they quit the stage. They reserve poetry for the footlights. Don't throw away your heart—but you won't. Too many hearts have been placed at Miss Darlington's disposal already; more than she can possibly know what to do with. She is lively and amusing, and I'm always glad to see her. There's not a word to be said against her, I believe; except that an actress is—an actress."

It was a badly written note; badly spelt. The signature "Rosetta" was certainly sprawling, with a smeared flourish beneath it. I was invited to tea on Sunday evening at six o'clock at the lodgings of Miss Darlington and Mrs. Bembridge in Gerrard-street, Soho.

The postscript ran, "Mind you come, my Duke!"

"You'll go? of course you'll go. I was sure of it." And Sir George moved away, smiling, yet rather tartly I thought.

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